



Hickory Grove Nursing Home Near De Pere

Hickory Grove building molders

Future unsure for ex-county nursing home

By Keith Goldschmidt
Press-Gazette

There is nothing to stop the wind blowing through the window frames of the former Hickory Grove Sanitarium, nothing to stop vandals from spray painting graffiti on the walls, nothing to stop nature from ravaging a once stately building along the bank of the Fox River.

It stands empty, just like it has since 1975 when Brown County closed the sanitarium and nursing home.

It stood empty as plans to turn it into a Playboy Club provoked residents, as plans for a condominium project failed because of sewage difficulties, as plans for a veal operation met strong opposition.

And it probably will be empty for at least another year as a plan to turn it into luxury apartments is put on hold.

During the past dozen years, the building has been a haven for vandals and teen-age partygoers.

All efforts to find a use for the three-story building and its 14.41 acres of land have failed.

One of the problems in developing the site is its remoteness from the urban area, said Bernard (Bud) Paruleski, director of the Brown County Planning Commission. "That's why it hasn't gone."

The site is in a secluded area in the town of Lawrence, south of De Pere on Lost Dauphin Road.

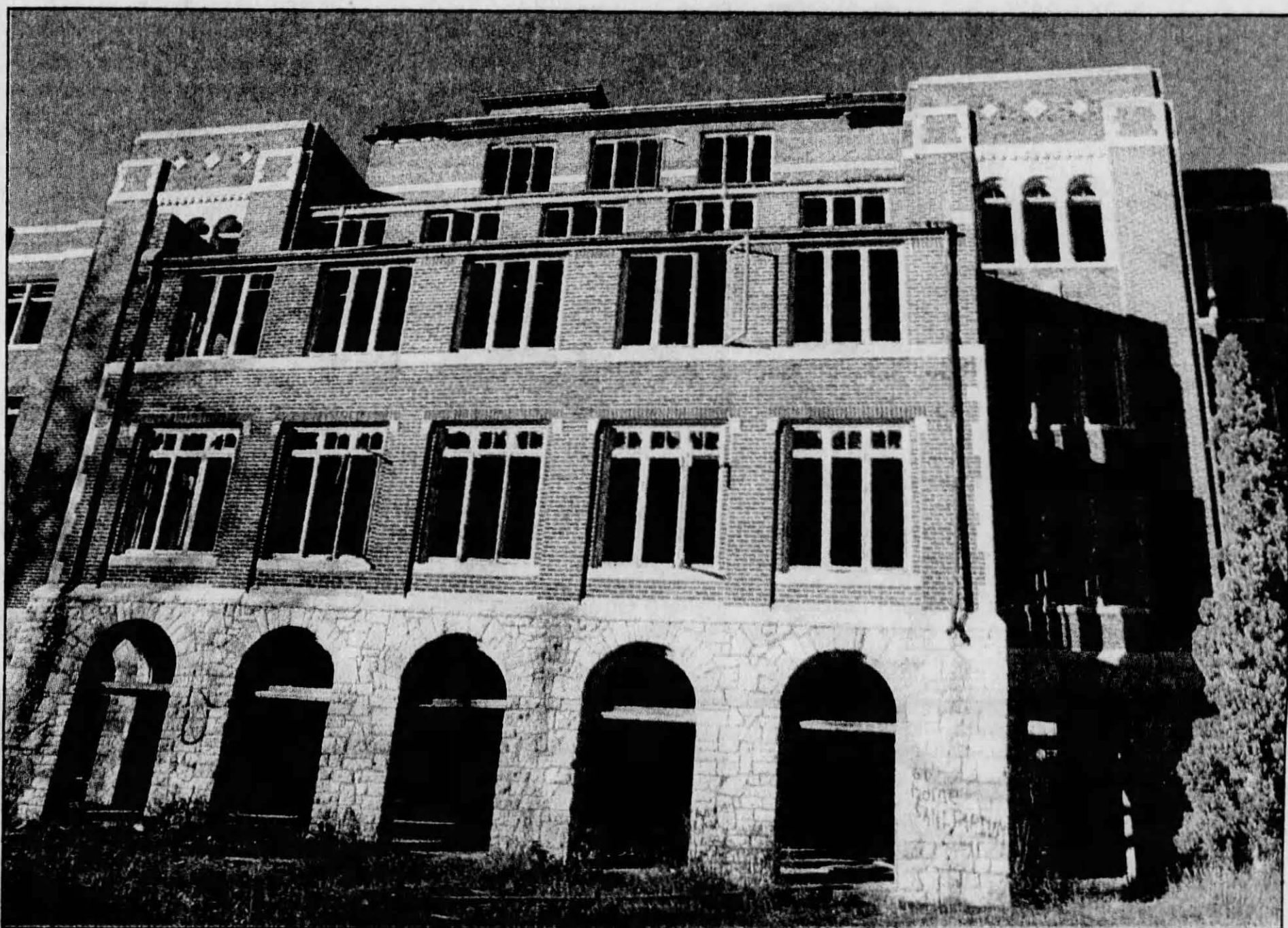
Lawrence Town Chairman J. Greg Little agrees, but offered another explanation.

"It looks to me there has always been a lot of talk ... but I don't know if there was any funding out there."

He called the building an eyesore and said, "It would be better if the thing were just torn down."

Current owner Al Pokel Jr. said the building is still structurally sound. He hopes to put about 50 apartments in it, but the apartment market is flooded now so he will wait on his plans.

He doesn't expect to do anything within the next



Press-Gazette photos by Mary A. Pember

Standing empty: The Hickory Grove Sanitarium in the town of Lawrence has stood empty since

1975. Plans to renovate it for luxury apartments have been put on hold.

"It would be better if the thing were just torn down."

— Town chairman

year and added it could be five years before the building is used.

The sanitarium was built in 1929 as one of the last two in the state to house tuberculosis patients. In the early 1970s, as TB patients no longer required such care, the facility was transformed into a nursing home.

By 1975, there were only 34 patients in the home, and the county closed it when it was faced with

state-required remodeling costing about \$500,000.

Elroy Nero and a few partners bought it in 1976 for \$180,000. They planned on turning it into a Playboy Club.

Roger Wesely, one of those partners who now lives in California, said the group had the franchise from Playboy and had the financing arranged with a New Jersey lender.

But Wesely said the identity of the lender spread through the area, and residents sent 200 letters to the lending institution, objecting to a Playboy Club on moral grounds.

"They (the lender) felt if there was so much local animosity" they wouldn't fund the project, Wesely said. So it died.

Nero would not comment because he said the news media and the publicity given the project were the reasons the Playboy Club failed.

The group then tried to develop a housing project at the site, either luxury apartments or condominiums, Wesely said. But he said the group ran into problems with sewage treatment plans and couldn't reach an agreement with the state Department of Natural Resources.

The building remained vacant, and the Pulaski State Bank, which held two mortgages on the property, foreclosed on it in 1983.

"It's such a gorgeous spot, it just makes me sick to think about it," Wesely said. "Green Bay is a small town in a lot of ways. Anytime you try something different ..."

He never finished the sentence.

Pokel bought the property from the bank in 1984 with a recorded mortgage of \$100,000, according to records in the Brown County register of deeds office.

He had hoped to use the building to raise veal calves, but the Lawrence Town Board rejected a rezoning request after a petition with 325 signatures objecting to the plant was presented to the board.

A lawsuit by Pokel against the Town Board for its action is still pending.

Pokel now plans luxury apartments for the site.

"I don't think the time is right yet," he said.

Little questioned the project.

"I don't think Mr. Pokel is really sincere in what he's planning to do," Little said.

Pokel wouldn't respond to that charge, but he said he hasn't given up hope for the project.

"It's going to be an excellent property for me or somebody," he said. "I think it's just a matter of time."



Destruction: The effects of vandalism are evident on the interior of the Hickory

Grove Sanitarium on Lost Dauphin Road south of De Pere.

Police want sanitarium razed

Empty building attracts partyers

By Julie Bell

Press-Gazette

The Brown County Sheriff's Department says the old Hickory Grove Sanitarium has become a dangerous gathering place for youths, and it wants someone to tear down the building.

Capt. Frank Tomcheck, whose officers last chased teen-agers out of the building Friday and cited a dozen for trespassing, said the abandoned structure in the town of Lawrence has simply become too dilapidated to be ignored any longer.

"There's no way they're going to remodel it," Tomcheck said. "It's just too far gone."

Floors are missing in places and elevator shafts are open,

Tomcheck said. Only a few shards of glass are left in the windows. Garage doors have been burned or pounded into splintered boards. Graffiti, including a line proclaiming that "Satan is Green Bay," mars the walls.

Tomcheck said he'll ask the Lawrence Town Board to declare the building a public nuisance and attempt to have owner Alvin Pokel Jr. pay for razing it.

The sanitarium, 2836 Lost Dauphin Road, was built in 1929 as one of the last two tuberculosis treatment centers in the state. It has been empty since Brown County closed the treatment center and nursing home in 1975.

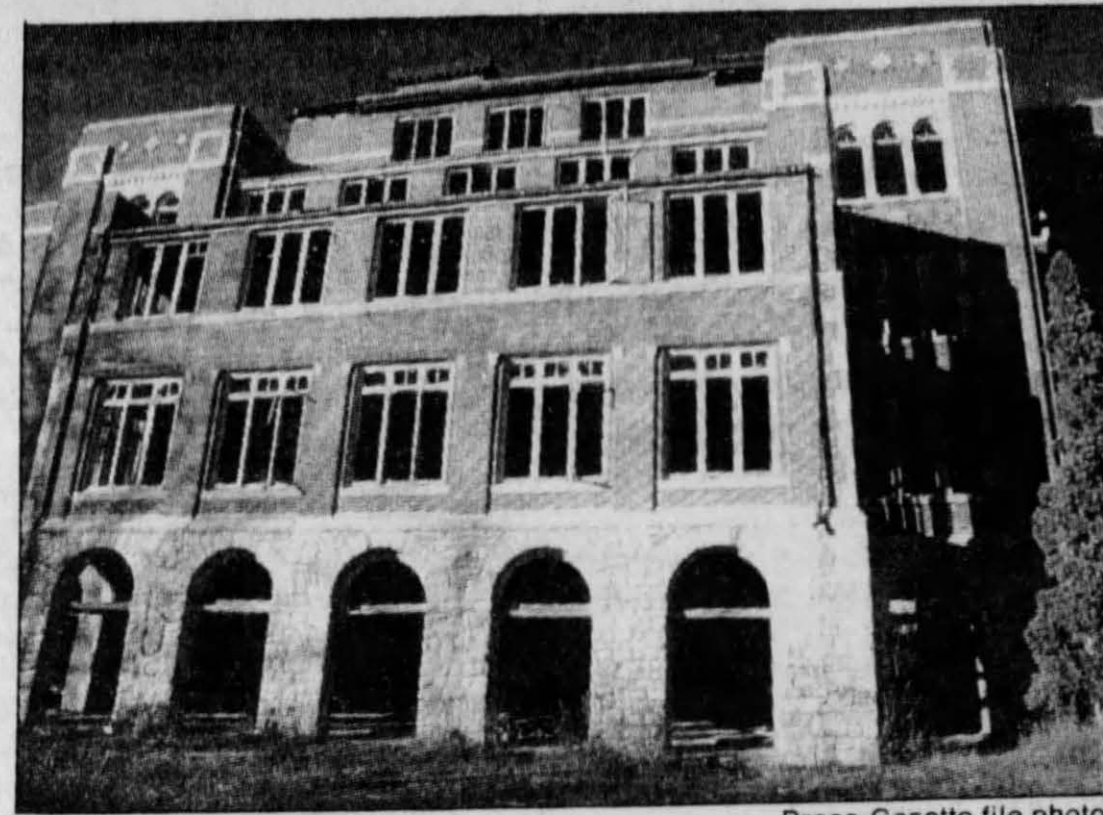
Pokel has come up with a number of ideas to renovate the building over the years, including a

veal farm and apartments. At one time, a Playboy club was even being considered for the site, which lies on a scenic bend overlooking the Fox River.

But nothing has come of the plans.

Geraldine Rademacher, who lives next door to the building at 2880 Lost Dauphin Road, said she still hopes the Town Board will do *something*. She finds garbage in her yard — left behind by partying teen-agers at the sanitarium — when she walks down her driveway to get the mail. At night, when the windows are open, she can hear the screeching tires and slamming car doors of youths gathering next door.

"That's all we can do is hope," Rademacher said.



Press-Gazette file photo

Want it down: Brown County police want the owner of the former Hickory Grove Sanitarium in the town of Lawrence to tear it down because they say it's unsafe.